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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to allow first graders the opportunity to read and write in a more natural and authentic manner than that permitted by using the basal reading series as the basis for reading instruction. The first grade reading program was transformed from a basal-oriented approach to a whole language approach. Through the use of children's tradebooks, poetry, daily unstructured writing assignments, and flexible reading patterns, the children were able to achieve the skills required by the basal reading tests as well as spend more time in the actual exercises of reading and writing. Results of the practicum were positive. The primary goals and objectives were met. An analysis of the objectives demonstrated that the language arts activities of reading and writing were dealt with more often within the whole language environment than in a basal reading classroom. The children enjoyed the process of reading and writing to a greater extent as measured by the amount of time spent reading and writing during free time. (Five tables of data are included. Appendixes include: student questionnaire, selected letters to parents, titles chosen as favorites by the children, samples of children's writing, and samples of children's writing ready for publication. Seventy-two references are attached.) (Author/MG)

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Meeting First Graders' Need For Rich, Authentic Literacy Experiences by Moving from a Basal Reader to a Whole Language Orientation

by

Wendy Brand

Cluster 36

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

January, 1991

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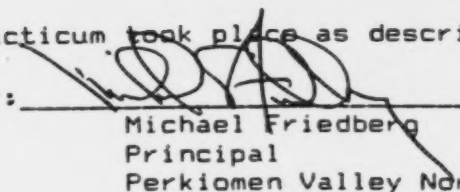
Verifier: 

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This practicum report was submitted by Wendy L. Brand under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Feb. 6, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

Meeting First Graders' Need for Rich, Authentic Literacy Experiences by Moving From a Basal Reader to a Whole Language Orientation. Brand, Wendy L., 1991: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Reading / Reading Instruction / Beginning Reading Instruction / Basal Readers / Whole Language / Language / Writing / Writing Instruction / Early Childhood / Language Experience

This practicum was designed to allow first graders the opportunity to read and write in a more natural and authentic manner than that permitted by using the basal reading series as the basis for reading instruction.

The writer transformed the reading instructional program in this particular first grade classroom from a basal oriented approach to a whole language approach. Through the use of children's trade books, poetry, daily unstructured writing assignments, and flexible reading patterns, the children were able to achieve the skills required by the basal reading tests as well as spend more time in the actual exercises of reading and writing.

The results of the practicum were positive. The primary goals and objectives of the practicum were met. An analysis of the objectives demonstrated that the language arts activities of reading and writing were dealt with more often within this whole language environment than in a basal reading classroom and the children were enjoying the process of reading and writing to a greater extent as measured by the amount of time spent reading and writing during free time.

This practicum contains many diverse instructional strategies that can be successfully employed by a teacher attempting to implement a whole language approach.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This practicum was conducted in a first grade classroom in a small public school system located in a small suburban town of a Mid-Atlantic state.

The school district has a population of approximately 2,300 students in two K-4 elementary schools, one 5-7 middle school and one 8-12 high school. Socioeconomically, the population within the school district ranges from lower to middle income, with the majority of the population white, middle class. Since there lately has been much development of land in terms of housing, the school district is expecting rapid growth in the near future. Until very recently, the population has remained stable with families tending to stay in the area. Many of the more experienced teachers in the district have had children of former students in their classes. The district itself has virtually no industry, and homeowners, often feeling overburdened with taxes, demand a large measure of accountability from the schools. Out of 42 school districts in the two-county area, the district is 40th in terms of teacher salaries.

Despite attempts by district personnel to alleviate the situation, there is a great feeling of rivalry, maintained by the parents, between the two elementary schools. The

North building is seen by many in the community to have inferior facilities and programs while the South building, being newer, has better facilities and more equipment such as computers and software. There is a discrepancy in the socioeconomic character of the constituency of the two schools, with the South building having a slightly more affluent population.

The school district prides itself on providing a good fundamental, basic education for all of its children. Innovations are few and traditional methods are employed by most of the teachers. Parents, as well as the majority of the staff are comfortable with the status quo. The most recent modernization has been the gradual purchase of computers for each elementary classroom and computer labs in the high school, the middle school, and the South building.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is one of five first grade teachers in the North building. The class is comprised of 24 children, many of whom have been tentatively identified by the kindergarten teachers as high achieving and/or gifted. The class is primarily self-contained with the children leaving the classroom for one 40 minute period each day to special area classes such as art, music, physical education, and library.

All teachers in the district are required to teach

subject matter specified in the curriculum guide designed for the grade level to which the teacher has been assigned. For the elementary grades, the subjects to be taught by the classroom teacher are reading, handwriting, spelling, language arts, arithmetic, social studies, and science. There is a reading specialist in each building to oversee the reading program but there is no curriculum coordinator or reading supervisor for the district. The building principals are responsible for the educational program of the children in their individual buildings; the reading specialist coordinates the reading program and is responsible to the building principal.

The writer's background and training include a master's degree in early childhood, two years teaching private preschool and 18 years' experience in the public schools, ranging from guidance to kindergarten, first, and second grades. Fifteen years have been spent teaching in this particular school district. The writer has been teaching first grade for five years, the first two years as the teacher of a Developmental First Grade and, when the Developmental First was disbanded, three years as the teacher of the gifted/high achieving section.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

In keeping with the policies of the school district, the children in the writer's classroom had been taught to read using a basal reader with a strong phonics component. The classroom was organized around three reading groups, top, average, and basic. Remedial readers were identified as early as second semester of first grade; they used a different basal reading series that presented fewer new words per story but still had a strong phonics base.

The basal reading series in first grade has three preprimers, a primer, and a first reader, each with a workbook that was usually done in the reading group, a skillpad that was used as seatwork, and unit and end-of-book tests. In addition, there is a set of parent activity pages for those children needing more reinforcement, flashcards of the new words for each story, charts for the teacher to use to present the phonics lessons, and the teachers' manuals. Reading groups in all of the first grades, including the writer's class, were approximately 35 minutes long, during which time part of the story was read silently, then aloud, the phonics lesson was presented, and workbook pages were completed. While one section of the class was involved in a reading group, the other children worked independently. Therefore seatwork was assigned, usually consisting of

skillpages from the reading series plus worksheets and ditto pages and occasionally an art project that could be completed independently. Although the basal teacher's manual suggests the workbook pages and skillpages that accompany the phonics lessons, seatwork was assigned at the discretion of the teacher. Periodically a creative writing assignment was given, usually from a story starter, a sentence or a title about which the children must write. Children were expected to work quietly and by themselves as they completed their assignments. Decisions concerning class management were determined by the classroom teacher.

In brief, the children had little time for exposure to authentic literacy experiences after completing the basal reading series' stories and accompanying workbook pages, skill sheets, and tests as supplied by the school district. The reading specialist had been vocal in urging teachers to incorporate "some whole language activities" into the reading curriculum but there had been no guidance concerning alternative methods of instruction, evaluation or classroom management techniques that a whole language classroom would utilize.

Problem Documentation

Baseline data supporting this problem was gathered during the week of March 5, 1990 in the writer's first grade classroom. During that time, the average reading group,

comprised of eight children, spent approximately 60-70 minutes each day completing basal reader activities. This included silent reading of the story, reading the story aloud, completing workbook pages with the group and completing skillsheets independently. Also required was a free-choice writing assignment as part of the daily seatwork.

After completing seatwork, the children chose activities from a wide variety of choices available to them. Some of the activities that were always available include: the classroom library which had books and children's magazines, a "listening house" with books and tapes, games and puzzles, a computer, art activities, paints, stencils and tracing equipment, stamp pads and stamps, old magazines to cut up, a typewriter, sets of old telephones, various math manipulatives such as cuisenaire rods and counting blocks, and assorted writing implements and different types of paper with which to draw and/or write. Various learning centers were also set up periodically, depending on the units of study. Despite the teacher urging them to read, only 2 children out of 18 who finished their assignments early, chose to read books on any one day during the week of observation.

On two successive Fridays in March, when the children were each asked individually what their favorite story was that they had heard or read that week, not one child chose a

story that was in the basal reader. The stories were either ones that the teacher had read in class or stories that they had read or heard at home.

The results of a brief teacher-created questionnaire (see Appendix A) completed by the children during the week of March 5, 1990 showed that 16 out of 20 children would like more time in school to read and/or to write. The children were instructed orally to color in one, two or three pictures of things that they wish they had more time to do in school. Choices included learning about science, learning about history, reading, writing, math, coloring, handwriting, learning about the world, learning about words, and learning about health. The choices were meant to roughly coincide with all of the instructional areas that the classroom teacher was responsible for teaching.

Results of the "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (McKenna & Kear, 1990) given during May, 1990 showed that 17 out of 20 children enjoyed recreational reading more than the reading done in school which consists of the basal reading stories. The survey asked the children to rate themselves on how they felt about reading and books by circling cartoon pictures of the cat Garfield. Each of the 20 items was then given a score from 1 to 4, with 4 signifying the most pleasure. Items 1-10 were concerned with recreational reading and items 11-20 concerned with academic or school-related reading. Item #3, "How do you feel about

reading for fun at home?", showed that only one child had a score of less than 3, signifying attitudes of enjoyment, whereas item #17, "How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?", found five children with scores less than 3, signifying that fewer children enjoyed reading that was done in school. This nationally-normed survey demonstrated that 17 children out of 20 preferred reading that they did at home to reading that they did in school, with each of the 17 scoring greater than 50% on an attitude of enjoyment associated with recreational reading. Only 8 children out of 20 scored higher than 50% on enjoyment of academic reading.

When completing writing assignments, the children wrote almost exclusively in the narrative or expressive mode, and seldom wrote for purposes of description, persuasion, exposition, or in the form of poetry. Inadequate time was made available for conferencing with the teacher concerning their writing so that little improvement was made in the writing except for changes in mechanics such as in spelling and punctuation.

Causative Analysis

The district financially supported the use of the basal to such an extent that there was little money left for allocation to the purchase of trade books and multiple classroom copies of children's literature. Additionally,

there was no support for in-service training of teachers concerning alternative forms of classroom management, instructional strategies, and evaluation that a whole language classroom involves.

The majority of the teachers in the school were comfortable using the basal readers with the logical, day-by-day succession of lesson plans. They were satisfied with the ease at which lesson plans can be developed since they have seen that most children did learn to read with the logical, orderly approach that the basal reader affords.

All second grade children use the basal reader with its controlled vocabulary and all were assumed to have a common background of phonics skills. Words particular to the series were expected to have been learned as was the particular phonics' terminology.

It was difficult and time-consuming to locate enough books that were easy enough for beginning readers to achieve success; multiple copies of such books were hard to obtain since all monies had already been allocated for the next school year. Children in this particular first grade had reading levels ranging from first preprimer to third grade reading level necessitating a wide range of reading material to be available in the classroom library.

Teachers were afraid that if the basal reader was not adhered to strictly, the required skills as tested by standardized tests would not be mastered. Fear of the

unknown is difficult to quantify; however, it was a definite factor in the reluctance of teachers to change a formula that had been working for so many years, namely, the basal reading system.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Review of the literature gave evidence of the lack of authentic literacy experience when the primary form of instruction is the basal reader.

Rogers (1982) declares that what is wrong with the teaching of, what he refers to as "the three R's", is "largely a result of a tendency to trivialize instruction. By 'trivialize' I mean, first, the practice of breaking up subject matter into smaller and smaller steps, assuming that mastery of the parts will yield mastery of the whole and, second, the isolation of instruction from purpose" (p. 236).

Bridges (1979) emphatically states that "basal readers which contain the unnatural language patterns characteristic of preprimers and primers make learning to read harder for children" (p. 504).

Allington (1977) concurs saying, "when reading takes a back seat to skills instruction, one has to ask the age old question about the cart and the horse" (p. 57).

Weaver and Watson, writing for the National Council of Teachers of English (1988), Larrick (1987), and Bussis (1982) all discuss the problem of a lack of authentic

literacy experience when the basal reading series is used as the primary vehicle of instruction.

Bussis (1982) notes that "no available evidence indicates that any identifiable group of subskills was essential to reading" (p. 238) as determined by the International Reading Association.

Larrick (1987) examines the unnatural language of the basal preprimers and primers, comparing them unfavorably to the excitement and unaffected rhythm of trade books for children. "[The basal] plans begin with reading as decoding of fragments...But no one has been able to prove that children learn this way" (p. 186).

Weaver and Watson (1988) point out that "because of their comprehensiveness, basal reading systems leave very little room for other kinds of reading activities" (p. 1). Bussis (1982) comments that "it seems bizarre that emphasis on 'essential' reading skills displaces actual reading in the classroom, but this is what happens far too often. And research has repeatedly shown that less competent readers receive the lion's share of the drill on skills. Children who are least able to read...are given the least exposure to books" (p. 238).

Fuhler (1990) also notes that "no one has been able to prove that children learn best from part to whole as some basals advocate" (p. 312). Many textbook manufacturers, aware of the movement towards the use of children's

literature in the reading program, are publishing literature-based series; however she notes, "the materials are literature based but the basal methods are still basal methods" (p. 312) with workbooks, tests, reinforcement dittos, vocabulary cards, and questions at the end of each selection. Morrow (1982) found that children prefer the varied story structures that are found in children's books but which are not found in even the best literature-based basal readers.

Cambourne (1988) describes what he calls as "the typical habit-formation lesson plan" as "the total literacy act [is] fragmented into subsets of logically determined and sequenced concepts or skills...[and later] the sub-skills and sub-concepts [are] mastered and the total act, which was fragmented, [is] supposed to come together in the learners' heads" (p. 21).

Lehman and Crook (1988) point out that "the emphasis in too many reading programs is on mechanical procedures...with most reading instruction producing skillful decoders, not actual users of reading" (p. 235).

Goodman (1986) states that "many school traditions seem to have actually hindered language development...by breaking whole (natural) language up into bite-size, but abstract little pieces" (p. 7). As Koeller (1981) says, "...if reading were not belabored in school, it would be a lot more fun" (p. 556).

Ross and Bondy (1987) say that "individual symbols (letters) frequently are meaningless to young children and may confuse them about the reading process. Furthermore, children faced with letter drill may develop inaccurate concepts of reading which lead them to dislike and avoid books" (p. 271).

Farr is quoted in Instructor (1990) as saying that "direct teaching of needed skills and strategies is essential, but fractionating reading and writing and attempting to master skills and strategies separate from the total act of reading and writing is not productive" (p. 47).

Taylor (1989) notes that "the methods of instruction that are now dominant dictate that, when a young child comes to school, 'learning' to read is presented as an orderly, linear, hierarchical sequence of tasks...Researchers and educators who support such 'methods' have learned not to see that children's early literacy behaviors are disorderly, seemingly erratic, and incomprehensibly chaotic" (p. 186).

Smith (1989) argues that "the bureaucratic control of classrooms through prescribed, objectivized 'programmatic' instruction and standardized tests is an affront to the intelligence of students and teachers alike" (p. 355). He also refers to "the gross overselling of evaluation, to the incredible notion that students will learn more (and teachers will teach better) if there is continual detailed monitoring of everything the student is supposed to learn"

(p. 35).

The literature revealed several causes for the problem. Vanterpool (1990) discusses the support or lack of support by teachers for innovations within a school. She specifies that "teacher involvement is an important environmental variable" (p. 39) and that teachers need to see a relative advantage compared to what exists.

Jachyn, Allington, and Broikou (1989) reveal that after the costs of basal readers have been allocated, there may be little money left in the budget for trade books and children's literature.

Au, Scheu, Kawakami and Herman (1990), Flood and Lapp (1989), Harp (1988), Hayward (1988), and Clay (1990) address the need for alternative forms of evaluation with a change in reading instruction approach.

Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) consider the fact that basal reading programs have dominated the American classrooms for decades with 90 to 95% of American teachers relying on them in 1958 and 80 to 90% of teachers still using them as the primary vehicle for instruction in 1980. (p. 470) This firm entrenchment is hard to breach.

Ridley (1990) specifies four constraints to the implementation of a movement away from using the basal reader: concern with accountability, lack of money, misunderstanding about what a whole language program entails, and general resistance to change. Indeed, all of

these are valid concerns of parents, teachers, administrators and school boards. How can teachers be held accountable for their students' learning? Where does the money come from for all the extra books the children will need? Will the children get the skills needed to learn with a whole language approach or does it just mean chaos? Since most of our children are learning to read with the basals, why alter a program that works? These are all questions that can be of legitimate concern to interested groups.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and objectives were projected for this practicum:

The goal of the writer is that the children in this first grade class have more time for exposure to authentic and rich literacy experiences that are not provided by the basal reader. Specific objectives include providing more time than is now allotted for children to actually engage in the reading and writing process, to eliminate the amount of time spent on workbook, skillpad and seatwork that is part of the basal reader program, and to expedite the children's reading progress in such a way that they will continue to advance in their reading skill.

In summary, at the end of the three month implementation period, the writer expects to have provided authentic literacy experiences, thereby facilitating their reading instruction, for this class of first graders.

Performance Objectives

The following objectives were projected for this practicum:

Objective 1: By the end of the three month implementation period, students will spend at least 60 minutes a day directly involved in reading and associated

activities other than those related to the basal reading program.

Objective 2: On a typical day during the evaluation period, at least 11 of the 22 children will choose to read a book when assignments are completed.

Objective 3: When children are asked about their favorite stories they have read or heard during the weeks of evaluation of the implementation period, a wide variety of titles will be mentioned.

Objective 4: By the end of the three month implementation period, students will spend at least 60 minutes a day directly involved with writing and associated activities, with four of the five days being free-choice writing.

Objective 5: When the children are given the "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (McKenna and Kear, 1990) at the end of the three month implementation period, 18 of 22 children will report that they enjoy reading by achieving a percentile rank of at least 50% on both the academic and the recreational scales.

Objective 6: Stories that are written by the children during the three month implementation period will reflect the variety of genres of literature to which the children will have been exposed.

Measurement of Objectives

Objective 1 was measured by observation of three children at varying levels of reading proficiency and noting the amount of time spent on reading and related activities This data was taken during the last week of the implementation period with desired behavior demonstrated by each of the three children engaging in reading activities for at least 45 minutes each day. So as not to overlap the amount of time measured by objective 2 (see below), the observation was done during the morning language arts block that was referred to as the Reading/Writing Workshop.

Objective 2 was measured by observing how many children chose to read after their initial assignment had been completed. On the first day of evaluation, the writer promised stickers to each child who had checked a list when they did any reading after they had finished their work, but this was counterproductive since it was difficult to determine who would have chosen to read if the external motivation of a sticker had not been there. On subsequent evaluation days, the writer kept a checklist of the children who did any sort of reading during the afternoon "activity time" which is approximately 45 minutes of free time.

Objective 3 was measured by asking each child individually on the last two Fridays of the implementation period to name favorite books, stories, or poems that he/she

had heard or read during the week. Appendix D has a list of the titles chosen by the children.

Objective 4 was measured by observation of three children at varying levels of writing proficiency and noting the amount of time spent on writing and related activities. This data was taken during the last two weeks of the implementation period with desired behavior demonstrated by each child engaging in prewriting and writing activities for at least 45 minutes each day. So as not to overlap with objective 2, this evaluation was done during the Reading/Writing Workshop time period. Samples from children's journals are shown in Appendix E.

Objective 5 was to be measured through the tabulation of the results of the "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (McKenna and Kear, 1990) given during the last week of the implementation period. The writer had proposed that desired behavior would be achieved when 18 of 22 children reported that they enjoyed reading by achieving a percentile rank of at least 50% on both the academic and the recreational scales.

Objective 6 was measured by a monitoring of the stories written by the children. Desired behavior was achieved when a variety of genres such as mystery, poetry, fairy tale, nonfiction, and description were attempted by the children. Appendix F has examples of some of the writing of the children.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Results

A log was kept during the three month implementation period. Unexpected events concerning the implementation of the practicum that were not anticipated, were recorded.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The children in this particular first grade classroom had little time for exposure to authentic literacy experiences after completing the basal reading series' stories and accompanying workbook pages, skill sheets, and tests as supplied by the school district. The reading specialist had been vocal in urging teachers to incorporate "some whole language activities" into the reading curriculum but there had been no guidance concerning alternative methods of instruction, evaluation or classroom management techniques that a whole language classroom would entail.

Much of the recent research in language arts has demonstrated the efficacy of moving away from a skills-oriented program such as basal readers present, to a more natural "whole language" approach. More a philosophy than a program, Whole Language would be on the opposite end of a reading instruction continuum from the part-to-whole phonics method. "Whole language philosophy is grounded in the understanding that language develops in young children through use in meaningful, naturally occurring, enjoyable situations" (Ogle, in Instructor, 1990). The literature addresses the importance of allowing children access to an authentic and rich literacy environment.

White, Vaughn and Rorie (1986) assert that "real reading is about comprehension, not skills" (p. 84).

Fuhler (1990), Hiebert and Colt (1989), Roser, Hoffman, and Farest (1990), Tunnell and Jacobs (1989), and Zarrillo (1989) all stress the importance of a literature-based reading program where children read trade books that supplant, not merely supplement, the basal reading program. "[B]ooks that present language in its naturally occurring variations help learners" (Bussis, 1982, p. 239).

Trachtenburg (1990) calls for a literature based program which integrates phonics instruction with fine children's literature. She offers a list of trade books that lend themselves to the teaching of the vowel sounds.

Zarrillo (1989) explores various interpretations, benefits and concerns of literature based programs citing the use of core books,the literature unit, and self-selection and self-pacing.

Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) define the commonalities of literature based programs: reading skills being acquired in much the same manner as learning to speak, the use of natural and uncontrolled language text, teachers spending much time reading aloud, a sustained silent reading time, teacher modeling of reading behaviors and practices, self selection of reading material, reading skills taught as they relate meaningfully to the stories presented, and process writing.

Roser, Hoffman, and Farest (1990) believe "that literacy skills develop in much the same way as oral language and that both language and literacy are mutually enhancing, natural partners for all children" (p. 554). Their definition of a literate environment is "one in which good books are shared and talked about, in which a wealth of response to literature is invited, and in which writing plays a major role and serves student purposes" (p. 554).

Hiebert and Colt (1989) discuss three basic patterns of literature-based instruction: teacher-selected literature in teacher-led groups, teacher- and student-selected literature in teacher- and student-led small groups, and student-selected literature read independently. They conclude that all three patterns need to be included in an effective literacy program.

Goodman (1986) emphatically states that whole language "rejects...simplifying texts by controlling their sentence structures and vocabulary or organizing them around phonic patterns" (p. 34).

Fuhler (1990) insists that "essential reading skills can be taught through a literature-based curriculum in a subtle, efficient manner within the context of the material each child is actively reading" (p. 314). She also advocates self-selection as an integral part of any literature-based program.

Eldridge and Butterfield (1986) are more cautious,

saying that "maybe children who enjoy reading more will actually read more. If so, one might make a case for using children's literature books on that criterion alone since there are studies suggesting that the amount of time children spend reading in school is associated with gains in reading achievement" (p. 37).

Harp (1989) suggests flexible grouping and cooperative learning strategies. He defines flexible grouping as when "children are placed in temporary groups based on their level of independence as learners" (p. 534). Cooperative learning groups have four to five students of mixed abilities working together to achieve a specific purpose and whose evaluation will be based on the group's general performance. "Activities in reading include partner reading, decoding, story structure, prediction, and story summaries...In writing, students engaged in peer conferences during planning, revising, and editing as they worked through the writing process" (p. 535).

Lamme (1989) notes that young children pay more attention to the pictures than to the story when we read aloud to them. Therefore one facet of whole language dwells on the idea of books as creations of the illustrator as well as the writer.

Hardt (1983) writes in favor of a comprehensive literature program for all of the grades where literature is used as a vehicle for enjoyment, not just to teach basic

skills. Hoskisson (1979), Jett-Simpson (1984), Koeller (1981), Taylor (1983), White (1954) all stress reading of whole stories and books to children.

Harste (1990) has noted that young children, prior to formal schooling, produce writing attempts reminiscent of the written language of their culture. Clay (1975), Gentry (1987), Graves and Stuart (1985), and Taylor (1983) all mention a grapho-phonemic system of language which has been called "invented spelling" that many children by age 5 and 6 are exploring and this method has been seen to proceed predictably and systematically. Researchers such as Newman (1984), Calkins (1986), Clay (1975) and Graves and Stuart (1985) assert the importance of daily writing as a "necessary complement of a reading programme which stresses sentences and meaning" (Clay, 1975, p. 2).

Calkins (1986) and Graves and Stuart (1985) discuss process writing that is such an important part of the whole language approach. Calkins discusses the developmental growth of children as writers, alerts teachers to the changes they will make, and also examines the writing conference, mini-lessons, the reading-writing connection, and various modes of writing across the curriculum. Graves and Stuarts' work, which stresses free-choice writing, is more anecdotal and less prescriptive.

Dudley-Marling (1985) and Grabe and Grabe (1985) discuss the use of computers in the language arts classroom.

Dudley-Marling focuses on "uses of the microcomputer that encourages the discovery that written language is meaningful, purposeful, and worthwhile" (p. 388). Grabe and Grabe discuss the use of computers with language experience stories and they say that "children using word processors may be more willing to take risks, to revise what they have written, and to produce longer, more detailed writing" (p. 512).

Strickland and Morrow (1990b) suggest the integrated school day using themes as a unifying force to the curriculum. "Integration of content and emergent literacy skills includes concern for children's interests and their individual differences" (p. 604). Many teachers using the whole language approach employ themes as their prime instructional strategy. Moss (1984) explains her version of the theming approach with Focus Units for various elementary grade levels.

Pinnell, Fried, and Estice (1990) examine the Reading Recovery Program which uses a tutorial approach to beginning reading instruction and includes many of the components of a whole language approach. The authors note that "instruction in beginning reading must include massive amounts of reading and writing...The most effective texts to support young readers do not have controlled vocabulary but present real stories with language close to the child's own" (p. 294).

Baskwill and Whitman (1986), Hayward (1988), Melser

(1983), and Lynch (1986) all propose ideas for day-to-day activities and instructional strategies.

Baskwill and Whitman (1986) discuss routines specific to whole language classrooms, themed units, evaluation, and classroom management strategies such as the use of a writing center, the classroom library, and a listening center.

Hayward (1988) emphasizes the amount of print available in a whole language classroom: charts, books, catalogs, announcements, labels, brochures, newspapers, children's work, experience stories. She speaks of invented spelling and daily journals and she asserts that "whole language is based on the premise that children learn language by using it, writing it, thinking it, and reading it" (p. 40).

Strickland and Morrow (1990a) also recommend daily journal writing as part of a whole language reading/writing classroom.

Melser (1983) concentrates on daily activities that can be done such as tape recordings of stories, shared reading, dramatization, daily news stories, drawing and writing, and individualized reading. Clay (1990) also adds reading book graphs, art samples, oral checks of a reader's knowledge of a book read, a writing vocabulary test where a child writes down all the words he knows in a given amount of time, dictation, and a written record of reading achievements as the child sees them.

Lynch (1986) addresses the use of Big Books and

Predictable Books and gives step-by-step instructions for their use which is especially helpful to an inexperienced teacher or one who is unsure of how to proceed with whole language instructional techniques. Big Books are large, poster-sized books that are designed to be seen by children up to 20 feet away. They are either popular trade books that have been enlarged for Big Book format or original books specifically designed as Big Books. Predictable books have one or more special features that help children read more easily such as common story patterns, repetitive story structure, repetition of vocabulary, rhythm, and rhyme. (Lynch, 1986, p. 18)

Strickland and Morrow (1989) have combined theoretical underpinnings of the whole language movement with specific activities for early childhood classes. Their premise is "that reading and writing develop concurrently and interrelatedly in young children" (p. 3) and that young children "learn through active engagement, constructing their understanding of how written language works" (p. 4). They emphatically state that "traditional, formal reading instruction typical of first grade is simply inappropriate for young children. So is the worksheet dominated reading curriculum...typical of the kindergarten classrooms" (p. 5). "The early childhood literacy program must adopt as its foundation functional, meaningful activities that involve reading and writing in a wide variety of ways" (p.6). Atwell

(1983) agrees, saying that "children must be allowed to talk with one another, read, listen, and write, not because they need to strengthen their language skills, but because, as social beings, they need to communicate" (p. 29).

Weaver and Watson (1988) recommend that local administrators include inservicing as part of ongoing support for teachers to develop alternative strategies and materials needed by those who are no longer using the basal as the foundation of a reading program.

Adams (1990) bluntly states that "the single most important activity for building the knowledge and skills eventually required for reading appears to be reading aloud to children. In this, both the sheer amount of and choice of reading materials seem to make a difference. Greatest progress occurs when the vocabulary and syntax of the materials are slightly above the child's own level of linguistic maturity" (p. 46).

Forester (1977) notes that "children who learn to read by reading, not only learn the skills we worry about so much --comprehension, fluency, good de-coding skills-- but retain their natural creativity and intuitive language learning skills as well" (p. 162).

Graves and Stuart (1985) advise "teachers who use methods unfamiliar to parents need to find ways to explain what they are doing" (p. 219). Fields (1988) also agrees that parents must be guided "to accept the natural approach

to literacy which current research supports" (p. 898). Rasinski and Fredericks (1989) state that "parents have a legitimate right to know why a particular approach to reading instruction is chosen and what home/school activities can complement that approach. Communication leads to greater levels of trust and support" (p. 263).

Baskwill and Whitman (1988) and Valencia (1990) discuss evaluation and assessment of reading progress through the use of anecdotal records, monthly writing samples, scrapbooks, audio and video records and comparison portfolios to demonstrate to parents the growth of the individual child during the year. Portfolio assessment seems to be one answer to accountability that is consistent with a whole language philosophy. Individual portfolios for each child would include some or all of the following items: samples of the children's writing, anecdotal records of reading/writing progress, reading logs kept by the teacher and/or the student, questionnaires on attitudes towards reading and writing, responses to literature tasks, standardized tests, audio or video tapes of the child reading at specified times during the year, a personalized statement from the student as a self-assessment, photocopied samples of stories that the child is reading at specified times of the year, sample spelling tests where the child writes as many words as he/she can spell in a certain length of time, and informal teacher-made instruments for

assessment. These portfolios would give a far more complete picture of the child's progress than the end-of-the-book and unit tests presently afford.

Other ideas to enable children to learn in a whole language classroom include the following:

Skits and short plays could be performed as an introduction to when the children will write and produce their own mini-plays in the spring. Melser (1983), Gunderson (1989), Baskwill and Whitman (1986) and Cambourne (1988) all mention dramatization as an important facet of a whole language program.

One child each night could have the privilege of taking home a doll named Astro and Astro's diary in which must be recorded Astro's activities of the afternoon and evening. That child would then have the responsibility to read to the class the diary entry the next day.

Each child would have an individual writing folder in which would be kept on-going stories, a list of possible future topics, and recent work prior to publication. A second writing folder would be kept by the teacher with all previous writing done by the child, anecdotal records of the child's progress, dated drafts of stories, and incomplete drafts that the child did not care to complete. These would be shared at parent conferences.

A read-aloud storytime conducted by the teacher would include three selections: a trade book, a selection of

poetry, and a story that has been written by a child to demonstrate that the work done by the children also has merit.

Children would have opportunities to write in both reading and writing journals, the former being a log of titles of stories and books they read with the dates, and writing journals being communications to friends or the teacher as well as reactions to class or home activities.

There would be a writing center which would be stocked with pens, pencils, crayons, markers, envelopes, cellophane tape, scissors, and different kinds of paper to encourage writing. In addition there would be a publishing center where children would regularly publish books; parent aides would help the children bind them. Paper copies would be kept in the class library to be used as a source for reading.

Authors' Day would be celebrated at the end of the year with each child reading his/her favorite story or book that had been published to parents, the principal, school board members and other important guests.

One way of monitoring the growth of skills is to ask the children to write in 10 minutes all the words they can think of, starting with their own name. This type of "spelling test" can be repeated every two to three weeks. An alternate form of spelling assessment is to give the same 10-item spelling test every two weeks to see the growth from

invented to standardized spelling.

Description for Solution Selected

The most ambitious venture was the abandonment of the basal reading series as the foundation of the reading program. Copies of the basal were in the classroom library to be used as anthologies and were sent home so that children would have material to read if their families did not wish to use the library or were uncertain about finding stories at the level of their child's reading ability. This also helped ensure that the children would have a common vocabulary for the basal reading tests that were still required by the reading specialist. The children who were reading at or above the third grade level were not sent home basal readers since they were readily able to find reading matter at their ability level.

Another traditional practice that was abandoned was the fixed set of three to four reading groups. Reading groups were set on a needs basis as evaluated by viewing the children's writing and by listening to their oral reading.

Children read in various patterns: whole group, small group reading the same title, reading partners, and individualized reading. Themed units were often employed.

An adaptation of Caulkin's writing workshop as described in The Art of Teaching Writing (1986) was set up in lieu of dittos and workbook pages as the children's daily

assignments. Dittos were set aside as a "choice" activity for students who enjoy them, but they were seldom used by the children. The language arts block was a "Reading/Writing Workshop" with the reading often leading to a prewriting activity. As Newman (1984) says in The Craft of Children's Writing, "experimentation is essential for learning language....One doesn't learn language as a watcher from the sidelines; one has to be a participant in what's going on....Children need to be able to experiment with what they want to say, to whom they want to say it, and how they want to say it" (p. 31).

Evaluation and assessment was demonstrated through the use of portfolios for each child, the contents of which were shared with the parents at conference time. These portfolios included results of the basal reading tests, all of the writing done to date by the child, a record of what the children had been reading with the teacher, and the results of a developmental spelling test (Morris and Perney, 1984). With the exception of a few pieces, all of the child's writing was then sent home with the parents.

This project succeeded because of four main factors:

The reading specialist was as eager as this writer to see the implementation of a whole language program in the school. For this district, it was unique. Support was forthcoming from both the reading specialist and the principal.

This writer served as a resource and a model for any other classroom teacher who was interested in a similar whole language approach in the school district. The superintendent, school board members and members of the public expressed interest in the approach and the writer was interviewed by a local paper and asked to write an article concerning this alternate method of teaching reading for a local publication that is sent out to every family living within the borders of the school district. In addition, the writer was invited to speak to the school board concerning implementation of the Whole Language approach as practiced in the writer's First Grade.

Report of Action Taken

The writer observed the following timetable to fulfill the objectives of this practicum:

Week 1: September 4-7, 1990.

The first week of implementation was an introduction to First Grade and information about a reading and writing classroom. An informal check of oral reading was given to ascertain approximate reading levels of the children, especially since many of the children placed in this particular section of First Grade were already reading. In a letter sent to the children prior to the first day of school, each child was asked to bring in something that he or she could read (see Appendix B). Books suitable to the

reading levels of the children were then placed in the classroom library.

Children were encouraged to write on the first day of school with an emphasis on communication and with a secondary purpose of verifying skill level in phonics, spelling and handwriting. A free-choice writing exercise was assigned every day as seatwork. Topics were suggested for children who required more guidance, but only one child during the first week chose a suggested topic; all other children wrote on topics of their own choosing. Lined experience paper, size 12" x 18" with one half of one side unlined, was given to the children for the writing exercise. Instructions were deliberately kept simple: "Write a story. You may draw a picture to explain your story."

Week 2 and 3: September 10-21, 1990.

During the second and third weeks of implementation there was an introduction of the Reading/Writing Workshop.

Whole group instruction made up the preponderance of time that is in the language arts block which is approximately 165 minutes long, barring the occasional assembly. Whole group lessons included reading from Big Books, introduction of the Poem of the Day, and short writing lessons in a particular skill.

The teacher read the Big Books to the children with subsequent reading done by the whole group. At this time,

two to three Big Books per week were introduced. Suggestions for introducing and successive readings are found in A Teacher's Guide to Shared Reading by F. L. Barrett (1984) as well as Using Big Books and Predictable Books by P. Lynch (1986).

A new poem was introduced every day, Monday through Thursday, and these poems formed the basis of the phonics instruction. Each day the previous poems of the week were read before the new poem was presented. The new poem was written on chart paper and read to the children and then the children read it many times in various ways, often using fingerplays or whole body movement to depict it. Various phonics rules that the children had to know for the basal tests were introduced through the poetry such as beginning sounds, short vowels, long vowels, blends and digraphs, endings, patterns, and word families. In addition, the use of metaphors, similes and poetic language were demonstrated through the use of this poetry. Children were asked to illustrate their own copies of the poems and keep them in their work folders until Friday. On Friday they read the poems to their reading partners, and then each child chose his/her favorite poem to read individually to the teacher. At the end of the week, the laminated large poems were hung on the classroom walls and removed only when there was no room for more recent poetry.

Language experience stories were written on various

topics to allow children to observe a story being composed. Conventions such as capital letters and ending punctuation were demonstrated as well as suggestions about how to begin a story, give supporting details and end the story. Children were often asked to spell words that followed phonics lessons already taught so that they could experiment with their own spelling attempts. Often the resulting composition would lend itself to dramatization and volunteers would pantomime or perform the language experience story the class had just written. Some of the resulting tales were so popular that they were laminated and placed around the room so that children could read them and act them out later.

Beginning with 15 minute blocks of time, children were placed in dyads for shared reading; readers were placed with nonreaders for these sessions. Each child was asked to read anything to the reading partner choosing from trade books at various reading levels, basal readers, the daily poetry, stories and poetry the children had written, or Big Books that had been shared with the group. Since there were multiple small copies of many of the Big Books, these were a popular choice among the children who had been initially identified as nonreaders. The best readers tended to choose books that the teacher had read during Storytime. Children were permitted to sit anywhere in the classroom for these shared reading sessions with a few remaining at desks but most preferring small nooks and corners.

Beginning with 20 minute blocks of time, children were engaged in writing activities related to or independent of their reading. Various topics were mentioned for children who needed direction, but most children chose not to use suggested topics. The amount of written text ranged from two-word labels to three-sentence stories. At this time, all of the children chose to illustrate the stories with detailed drawings as if to allow the drawings to take the place of much of what the story was supposed to convey.

By the end of the two week period, the paired reading and the writing activities were consolidated into a Reading/Writing Workshop of approximately 45 minutes.

Week 4-7: September 24-October 19, 1990.

These next three weeks were concerned with an expansion of the Reading/Writing Workshop.

Whole group instruction with Big Books and Predictable Books continue. Individual, paired, and small group encouragement of both reading and writing attempts continued.

Reading groups were started with multiple copies of books. Beginning readers were introduced to books from The Story Box, a set of titles published by The Wright Group that includes predictables and other very easy stories with bold, colorful illustrations and large print. Each child was called up to at least one group per day, but since the time

for each group to meet was only about 10 minutes, many children chose to join more than one group and read more than one book a day. A group of five children was informally evaluated to be at a third grade reading level and they read from paperback copies of trade books that had been obtained from book clubs.

Peer conferencing was introduced as a whole group lesson initially. A child read a story he had written that morning to the class and the children were encouraged to tell all the positive things they could think of about the story. Modeling of possible questions of an author was conducted by the teacher with the emphasis on encouragement of all attempts at positive communication. The author then responded to questions that members of the class posed about the story that had been written. Finally the author told how he thought he could make his story better. Every day for a week we would do two or three different children's stories, always accepting volunteers. Since there was never enough time to read the stories of all the volunteers, after the initial two or three were read, the children were asked to pair up and try the same techniques on each other. This is a variation on the peer conferencing that Lucy Caulkins discusses in The Art of Teaching Writing (1986). The children were encouraged to revise their stories based on the questions that their partner had for them and the suggestions they had made themselves. It was stressed that

writers write for readers to read, that they must please an audience as well as themselves.

After the week of reading stories to the entire class, children were encouraged to read stories aloud to a friend whenever they felt they were finished with the story. A few children were eager to do this, but most of the time the children waited for the teacher to announce that it was time to share the writing orally with a friend. The peer conferencing techniques as outlined above were followed.

During the third week of school, the children were given the "First Grade Spelling Test" as developed by Morris and Perney (1984) as a baseline score to determine developmental level in spelling. The range was from 16, signifying a developmental spelling level of Initial Consonant Only, to a score of 88, the level denoting a standard English speller since a perfect score is 90.

One child each day was permitted to write his/her story of the day on the computer instead of on experience paper. In order to speed up the laborious process of typing on a completely unfamiliar keyboard, a laminated drawing of a keyboard was in each child's work folder and every day a short whole group lesson would be taught utilizing this paper keyboard with the children racing to "type" spelling words, names, short sentences, the alphabet, the answers to riddles and other words. In this way, the keyboard was relatively familiar to them when it was time to type their

stories using "The Children's Writing and Publishing Center", a word processing program marketed by The Learning Company.

Weeks 8-13: October 22-November 30, 1990.

The Reading/Writing Workshop was in place for the language arts block of approximately 165 minutes. Whole group instruction with Big Books, Predictables, and other trade books, the daily poetry and phonics exercise, and mini-lessons concerning reading and writing strategies utilized approximately 35-45 minutes of time at the beginning of the day. An additional 10-15 minutes of time at the end of the morning was spent reading aloud stories or poetry children had written and to do spelling or dictionary skill work.

During the Reading/Writing Workshop small groups and individuals were asked to read from trade books, stories or poetry they had written, books that other children had written, children's magazines, and other printed materials in the classroom. It was found that when children were required to read aloud to each other or to an adult, comprehension was enhanced as well as interest sustained.

Individual and small group lessons were given on decoding skills and other reading strategies. Occasionally vocabulary words that are specific to the basal reader that all first graders are expected to know were deposited in a

"word bank" but this strategy was employed only for the slowest readers.

Since the reading materials budget for the school had been exhausted by the purchase of basal readers and accompanying materials, the teacher was forced to look elsewhere for reading matter. This was done through the use of the paperback book clubs, Seesaw and Lucky (Scholastic) and Trumpet Book Clubs. The teacher would look through the monthly advertising circular sent by the publishers and choose two or three book titles from each club that would serve as core books for reading groups. A letter was sent home explaining that these books would be used in school in reading groups and then sent home with the children who purchased them. The cost of each book was between $.50 and $1.50 and the parents were not required to buy any of the books. With the bonus points given for the purchase of books, the teacher would order two extra copies of each title so that children who were not financially able to purchase, would still be able to read those books. Additional groups of six books of a particular title were ordered with bonuses that the publishers offered. This was found to be an efficacious and inexpensive method of obtaining a rich variety of trade books for the children since both of the aforementioned companies publish quality literature for children and they offer them at low prices through these book clubs.

It was discovered that the children worked harder on their expressive reading when they knew they would have an audience. Therefore it was arranged for the children to read periodically with the kindergarten classes. Not all of the children were ready at one time to read their books, so usually there would be one reader to each group of two to three kindergartners. Since the first grader had practiced reading the book many times to the teacher, volunteer aides, and various reading partners, a fluent rendering of the story was offered to the visiting kindergartner.

Children would also sign up to read a book to the whole class during Storytime. If there was another copy of the book, the teacher would show the pictures while the child read the story. Children were urged to practice their oral reading of the story at home or in class before reading it aloud and fluent reading was ensured with the "three strikes and you're out" rule, that is, three reading errors and you must sit down and try again on another day.

Another technique used for oral reading was The Science Expert strategy. Two copies of five different nonfiction books on various science topics at approximately a third grade reading level had been sent to the teacher through a promotion of Weekly Reader. These books were introduced to and read by the top reading group and then discussed. Each child chose an area about which to become an "expert" and then those readers each chose an "apprentice" scientist from

a group of about ten children who could read the books with limited help. The better reader then read the book to the apprentice, the apprentice read the book to the original reader, both children discussed it together, discussed it with the teacher, went to the library with an aide to do further "research" on the topic, and thus became the class experts on their particular theme. The rest of the class signed up to be taught about these subjects by the "class experts". For the first time through, the better reader stayed with the apprentice to help them read any words that might give them trouble, but on subsequent readings, the apprentice was on his own. The class was given three times over a period of three days to switch topics so that each child, except for the apprentice-turned-expert, was able to learn about three different science subjects. This was a very popular unit with all of the children.

During this part of the implementation period, journals were introduced and given out. It was explained to the children that anything written in the journals would not be published and would only be seen by the teacher if the child gave the journal to the teacher. Any child who gave a journal to the teacher would get a response in writing within the journal; for many of the children, this was a strong incentive to write.

To give the children additional practice writing at home, The Magic Blanket Journal was introduced. Snuggle

Piggy and the Magic Blanket by Michele Steptoe (1987) was read to the children during Storytime. The story involved a blanket that was made by the aunt of a little piggy and when the hero of the book would sleep under the blanket, all the animals and people that were pictured on the blanket would come to life and dance with him. The story captured the imagination of the children and they decided to make a Magic Blanket. The teacher asked for donations of sheets, cut them up into squares, the children made pictures with fabric crayons and ironed them on the squares. The teacher brought a sewing machine to school and the children did all of the sewing of the blanket under the watchful eye of parent volunteers. When the blanket was done, the teacher composed a story patterned after the original Snuggle Piggy story and put it and a blank journal with a parent's introductory letter (see Appendix F) in a sturdy canvas bag. The children alternated turns taking the bag home and writing about what they dreamed while they slept under the Magic Blanket or an "imagination story" if they couldn't remember their dream. The next day the story was read to the class and a new dreamer was chosen. This was a very popular activity with both the children and their parents.

Stories that children want to have published were put into a "publishing bin" until Friday story conference/editing time when the author and the teacher discussed the story and any possible revisions that may have

to be made. After corrections had been made by the author, the story to be published would go to a typist, the teacher or parent aide. With the help of the teacher, the author completed the publishing by deciding on placement of sentences on a page, glued on the typed text, and made outlines of the illustrations. The pages were then photocopied so that two copies of the story were made, one for the author to color and the other to be bound with an oaktag cover and placed in the class library for future readers to color if they wish. The final colored and illustrated copy was bound by the child using wallpaper-covered textbook covers for the front and back. The child was then invited to read it to the class and the kindergarten class in the next room. The hardcovered books are kept in the classroom until Author's Day in June.

In addition to writing individual stories every day, the class also had whole group lessons in writing poetry. Patterns from familiar children's rhymes were used for the first few attempts until the children were more comfortable writing their own poetry, rhymed and unrhymed. Each child made a small book and filled it with his/her original poetry for Christmas presents for parents.

The children were involved in creating Big Books as a whole class project as discussed in Towards a Reading-Writing Classroom (1987) by Butler and Turbill. The first Big Book was based on Where Did My Mother Go? by Edna

Mitchell Preston (1978) with the children dictating and illustrating the story Where Did My Teacher Go? after traveling all over the school to do research for their story. When it was completed, it was sent to all of the teachers in the school that were mentioned in the book and the class received many fine letters of appreciation. One class of fourth graders wrote letters telling the first graders what their favorite parts were and this way the children could understand what it was to write for an audience.

Other activities included choral reading to a third grade class, small-group story writing, writing letters to servicemen in Saudi Arabia, writing to penpals in California, New Jersey, and Florida, making a filmstrip and a commentary to be read with it to send to the penpals, making communities and writing "histories" about them, making star constellations and writing stories about them, writing group books about Indians and animals, writing letters of protest to the Food Service Director who served tunafish sandwiches, and writing a class constitution. Children need a reason to write and story starters found in magazines and activity cards usually do not have the immediacy and veracity for which children are looking. Children need to write in order to become writers just as they need to read to become readers, but the reading and writing need to be authentic and have meaning for the

children and not simply be another exercise in a book.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION

Results

The problem that existed in this writer's work setting was that the children in this particular first grade classroom had little time for exposure to authentic literacy experiences after completing the basal reading series' stories and accompanying workbook pages, skill sheets, and tests as supplied by the school district. To address this need for authentic literacy experiences, this writer changed the instructional strategy of teaching reading from a basal orientation to a Whole Language approach. Goals for this practicum included providing more time for children to actually engage in the reading and writing process, to eliminate the amount of time spent on workbook, skillpad and seatwork that is part of the basal reader program, and to expedite the children's reading progress in such a way that they would continue to advance in their reading skill.

At the end of the three month implementation period, the writer expected to have provided authentic literacy experiences, thereby facilitating their reading instruction, for this class of first graders.

Specific objectives were designed to achieve these goals. The following will be a list of each objective

succeeded by the results related to that specific objective:

Objective 1: By the end of the three month implementation period, all children will spend at least 60 minutes a day directly involved in reading and associated activities other than those related to the basal reading program.

Objective 1 was measured by observation of three children at varying levels of reading proficiency and noting the amount of time spent on reading and related activities Table 1 displays the results of this observation of a child who is reading at about the 3.5 level, one who is reading at about a low second grade level, and a child reading at the First Reader level, second semester first grade. This data was taken during the last week of the implementation period with desired behavior demonstrated by each child engaging in reading activities for at least 45 minutes each day. So as not to overlap the amount of time measured by objective 2 (see below), the observation was done during the morning language arts block that was referred to as the Reading/ Writing Workshop.

"Reading activities" were defined as reading alone, reading with a partner, reading to a partner, discussing the reading with a partner, watching a partner read, reading orally to an adult, reading silently in the presence of an adult, and discussing the story with an adult. The choice of

reading matter was both teacher-directed and student-directed. Choices included trade books, basal readers, student-created books, poetry written on experience charts, Big Books, student-created Big Books, student journals, children's magazines, children's encyclopedia, student-created stories on experience charts, and Weekly Readers. Within the classroom library were books representing the following genres: poetry, folktales, fairy tales, talltales, mystery, joke and riddle books, fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, contemporary fiction, alphabet books, number books, science books, natural history, history. Since the books that the teacher had read to the class were the most popular, those books were left in the classroom library after they were introduced. In addition, another 70-80 books were rotated once each month for variety, including seasonal books for Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas/Hanukkah.

Table 1

Minutes* Spent Reading By Children of Varying Reading Proficiency

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Sarah	75	70	65	70	70
Matt	60	50	55	55	45
Andrew	50	45	45	55	45

*Minutes are rounded to the nearest 5 minutes for ease in observation.

Objective 2: On a typical day during the evaluation period, at least 11 of the 22 children will choose to read a book when assignments are completed.

Objective 2 was measured by observing how many children chose to read after their initial assignment had been completed. Table 2 displays the results of this observation which was done in the afternoon during the children's "activity time". On the first day of evaluation, the writer promised stickers to each child who had checked a list when they did any reading after they had finished their work, but this was counterproductive since it was difficult to determine who would have chosen to read if the external motivation of a sticker had not been there. On subsequent three evaluation days, the writer kept a checklist of the children who did any sort of reading during the afternoon "activity time" which is approximately 45 minutes of free time. Therefore, only the three days that were observed by the teacher are reported. "Reading" was defined as holding a book in the proper orientation and waiting for a long enough time to turn the page so that it was assumed that the reader had probably read the words contained on the page. No questioning by the teacher was involved and no minimum time period was used as a determinant. Children were also given credit for reading if they were writing a story or writing in journals. Table 2 makes a distinction between "reading" and "reading while writing".

Some of the activities that were always available during activity time include: the classroom library, a "listening house" with books and tapes, games and puzzles, a computer, art activities, paints, stencils and tracing equipment, stamp pads and stamps, old magazines to cut up, a typewriter, sets of old telephones, various math manipulatives such as cuisenaire rods and counting blocks, and assorted writing implements and different types of paper with which to draw and/or write. Various learning centers were also set up periodically, depending on the units of study.

Table 2

Numbers of Children Who Chose to Read During Free Time

Total Number of Children - 24			
	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Reading only	10	12	11
Reading while writing	5	5	7
Total	15	17	18

Objective 3: When children are asked about their favorite stories they have read or heard during the weeks of evaluation of the implementation period, a wide variety of titles will be mentioned.

Objective 3 was measured by asking each child individually on the last two Fridays of the implementation period to name favorite books, stories, or poems that he/she had heard or read during the week (see Appendix C for the titles). Table 3 displays how many different titles were mentioned on the two evaluation days.

Table 3

Number of Different Titles Mentioned by Children as Being Their Favorites

Total Number of Children - 24	
First Friday of Evaluation	Last Friday of Evaluation
17	15

Objective 4: By the end of the three month implementation period, all children will spend at least 60 minutes a day directly involved with writing and associated activities, with four of the five days being free-choice writing.

Objective 4 was measured by observation of three

children at varying levels of writing proficiency and noting the amount of time spent on writing and related activities. This data was taken during the last two weeks of the implementation period with desired behavior demonstrated by each child engaging in prewriting and writing activities for at least 45 minutes each day. When the children were given the Developmental First Grade Spelling Test (Morris and Perney, 1984) one child was a Standard English speller, one child was a Letter Name speller, and one child was a Early Letter Name speller.

Prewriting and writing activities were defined as participation in a group discussion of writing plans, discussion of writing plans with a partner, writing on experience paper, writing in a journal, composing a story on the computer using the children's word processing software, drawing a picture to illustrate a story, reading the story to a friend or adult in order to revise, revising, and writing instructions on the chalkboard for other children to follow. (Handwriting practice was not included in this evaluation since that is a fine-motor control activity and not within the scope or the intent of this practicum.)

So as not to overlap with objective 2, this evaluation was done during the Reading/Writing Workshop time period of the morning. Table 4 displays the results of this observation with samples from children's journals shown in Appendix D.

Table 4

Minutes* Spent In Writing Activities By Children of Varying Writing Proficiency

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Katy	90	70	60	55	60
George	55	50	45	55	50
Sean	45	50	45	50	45

*Minutes are rounded to the nearest 5 minutes for ease in observation.

Objective 5: When the children are given the "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (McKenna and Kear, 1990) at the end of the three month implementation period, 18 of 22 children will report that they enjoy reading by achieving a percentile rank of at least 50% on both the academic and the recreational scales.

Objective 5 was to be measured through the tabulation of the results of the "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (McKenna and Kear, 1990) given during the last week of the implementation period. This instrument had a reliability coefficient of .74 for first graders as shown in the documentation (McKenna and Kear, p. 638) However, when the survey was administered to the class on two occasions 11 days apart during the implementation period, it

was determined that the scores were so different that for this class, internal consistency did not exist. Therefore this objective could not be measured by using the "Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey". Reading enjoyment must be assumed by the results of measuring objective 2, the amount of time spent reading during activity time when many other choices were available to the children in addition to reading material.

Objective 6: Stories that are written by the children during the three month implementation period will reflect the variety of genres of literature to which the children will have been exposed.

Objective 6 was measured by a monitoring of the stories written by the children. Desired behavior was achieved when a variety of genres such as mystery, poetry, fairy tale, nonfiction, and description were attempted by the children. Appendix E has examples of some of the writing after it has been edited for "publication" both in and out of the classroom. Opportunities for children to publish their work included writing for "North News 'n' Notes", a school newsletter, "Brand New News", a class newsletter, small-group books of stories, class books of stories, and individual books.

Discussion

The results of this practicum confirmed and exceeded the writer's expectations that moving from a basal reader orientation to a whole language approach would be beneficial in terms of facilitating growth in reading and writing.

A review of the literature reveals that others have met similar positive results in utilizing the solution strategies chosen by the author. Routman (1988) employed a similarly successful whole language program in her first grade classroom. Butler and Turbill (1987) and McVitty (1986) describe several teachers with diverse teaching styles that successfully implement a whole language approach in their classrooms. Tierney, Tucker, Gallagher, Crismore, Pearson (1988) present vignettes of teachers who successfully introduce specific whole language strategies in their classrooms.

The writer had been confident that the primary goal of affording the children a more naturalistic reading and writing curriculum would enable the children to learn to read. At the same time, this writer was unwilling to predict whether the children would be able to make quicker gains in reading than those made through the use of the basal reading series since the writer had in past years successfully guided children through the basal at a more rapid pace than that of her first grade colleagues. After comparing the records of this writer's students from the last two school

years with students in this class, the writer can demonstrate that, for the most part, the children in the whole language classroom make faster progress in reading than do children in a more traditional reading program that utilizes the basal reader. This progress is shown both by the levels of achievement as demonstrated on the basal reading tests which are still required by the reading specialist, and the general readability level of the books that the children choose to read. In past years, students would rarely attempt to read books in the classroom other than the basal reader since that is all they believed they were able to read. Parents who have had children learn with both methods in this writer's classroom have commented on the far greater progress made by their child who is learning with the whole language approach. At the same time, the writer also notes that the two poorest readers have required a more structured reading program and choose to read to the teacher during the Reading/Writing Workshop in a formal reading group, reading from the controlled vocabulary basal reader. Fortunately, the flexibility of a whole language classroom makes this possible since the goal is to accommodate all readers, no matter what their learning style.

The one objective not met because of instrumentation failure could be subsumed under other objectives, particularly the one delineating the numbers of children who

read and wrote during their free time in school.

One unexpected result was noted when the questionnaire "What would I like to have more time to do in school?" was administered at the end of the evaluation period. The children were instructed orally to circle three pictures of things that they wish they had more time to do in school. Choices included learning about science, learning about history, reading, writing, math, coloring, handwriting, learning about the world, learning about words, and learning about health. The choices were meant to roughly coincide with all of the instructional areas that the classroom teacher was responsible for teaching. This writer anticipated that the children would have had so much time in which to read or write, whether assignments or by choice, that they would not choose those areas on the survey. However, Table 5 shows that 12 children out of 24 wanted to have more time to spend on either reading or writing with 2 children asking for more time to both read and write. Since this teacher has integrated all of the other curricular areas, with the exception of arithmetic, into language arts in the morning Workshop and the afternoon block of time, there is no additional available time for the children do pursue reading and writing interests during the school day. The implication is that interested children will follow these interests outside of school. It is difficult to say whether these children would have shown the same

interest if they had been involved in a more traditional reading/writing program, but it does show that the great amounts of time spent reading and writing did not damage their enthusiasm. The children who indicated this interest are from all reading levels, from the very top (approximately 3.5) to the bottom (primer level) and all levels of writing ability, standard spellers, to those who are at the Early Letter Name level which is the lowest writing level in this class (Morris and Perney, 1984).

Table 5

Results of "What would I like to have more time to do in school?" Questionnaire

Total of circled responses - 72	
Number of children who want to spend more time reading	7
Number of children who want to spend more time writing	3
Number of children who chose both writing and reading	2
Total number of children who want to read and/or write more often in school	12

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that any replication of this practicum be implemented for the entire school year.

2. It is recommended that teachers who wish to implement this practicum or a similar whole language approach be aware that the preparation demands are higher than those of a basal reading program.

3. Because of the above, it is recommended that teachers should not be required to teach using this method but should be supported by administrators and reading specialists if they choose to teach from a whole language orientation.

4. It is recommended that a teacher wishing to replicate this practicum or a similar whole language approach start implementation slowly. One approach might be to start the writing program for at least one semester or a year before carefully branching out into the reading program since this writer found the writing program easier to implement and manage.

5. This practicum will continue on an ongoing basis in the writer's classroom and hopefully serve as a model to others wishing to implement a similar program.

Dissemination

This practicum has been shared with the reading specialists, the Curriculum Supervisor, and the Superintendent of the writer's school district. In addition, the Staff Development Specialist has requested a copy of this report with the intent of possible dissemination of parts of it to pertinent faculty members.

This writer will share the results of the practicum with any other teacher who desires to implement any whole language strategies in the classroom.

This writer is willing to share the results of this practicum with undergraduate or graduate students in early childhood, elementary education, or reading/language arts programs.

This writer is exploring the possibilities of publishing portions of the practicum in various journals such as The Journal of Language Experience or The Reading Teacher.

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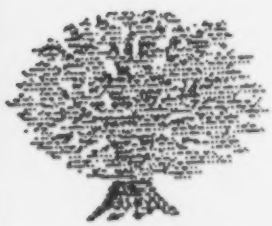
APPENDIX A

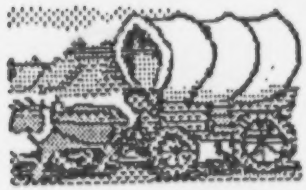
QUESTIONNAIRE: WHAT WOULD I LIKE TO HAVE MORE TIME TO DO IN SCHOOL?

ame_____

What would I like to have more time to do in school?

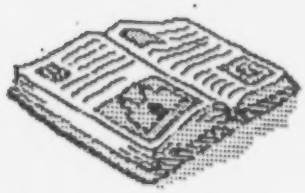


Learning About Science

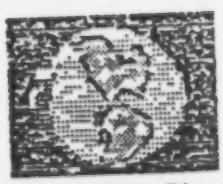


Learning About History

Learning About Health

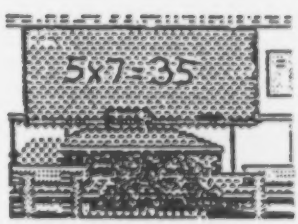


Reading



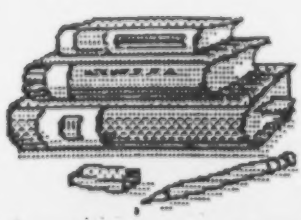
Learning About the World

Handwriting

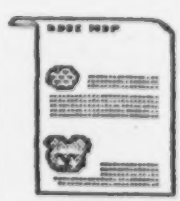


Math

Coloring



Learning About Words



Writing

APPENDIX B

SELECTED LETTERS TO PARENTS

This first letter was sent to each child in the class.

August 15, 1990

Dear

First Grade will be starting soon and I can hardly wait! I'm really looking forward to meeting you all.

For the first day of First Grade I would like each one of you to bring in something that you can read. It can be a book or a poem or a story. It can be something that you wrote or a sign or an ad. Or it can be your name printed on a card. This is just to show me what you can read because I know that all of you can read right now. And you will all learn to read even better. I'll tell you something about me--the thing I like to do best in the world is read. (Except for hugging my daughter; I like that even better.) I have some wonderful books to introduce to you!

Besides reading, we also write every day, do math, sing, make friends, play games, do art projects, go to the library, go to gym, go to music, have recess, eat lunch, use the computer, listen to books, watch movies and filmstrips, learn about science and social studies, and lots more. We don't do all of those things every day, though. If there are some things you would like to learn about, write them down on a piece of paper and give it to me. Maybe we will do them in class sometime.

I will tell you more things you need to know about First Grade when I see you on Tuesday, September 4. I'm getting everything ready for you!

Love,

Mrs. Brand,
Your First
Grade Teacher

Dear Parents,

Your child will be having a wonderful reading and writing experience this year. He/she will be learning to read with the very best of children's books available! Hundreds of books will be in our classroom and we will also have access to the school library for additional books for more information on various topics. Once a month I will be sending home Troll and Seesaw News, announcements of sales on excellent paperbacks at your child's reading level. I will suggest titles that we will be using in your child's reading group and if you purchase them, he/she will be buying a book that he/she will be proud to read to the entire family!

The daily reading program will consist of:

1. Hearing good literature -- stories and poems every day, both old favorites and new ones.
2. Rereading with children joining in as they are ready.
3. Phonics and word attack skills instruction.
4. Small group reading instruction with teacher guidance. Books used are paperbacks that are classics or proven favorites.
5. Time for free-choice individualized and/or shared reading.
6. Nightly sign-out of favorite books as the children are ready.

It has been my experience, and this has been recognized by research, that children can best develop a love of reading along with reading proficiency and vocabulary/language development through a literature approach in beginning reading instruction.

A large part of our program will involve daily writing. It has been demonstrated that first graders can write much more than once thought if they are allowed to use their own "invented spellings" and are encouraged to be creative. Good spelling will come later as the reading and writing process develops. Encourage writing for meaning and communication, and standard spelling and punctuation will come in time. We will be having weekly or biweekly spelling tests also.

Parent involvement will make a difference in your child's reading success. I will be sending home stories, books, and poems for you to read with your child. If you are available to come into the classroom on a regular basis, when I send home a notice about that in a few weeks, perhaps you would like to sign up. If you are unable to come into the classroom but would like to help at home, we can use you also. Baking or making treats for holiday parties is always welcome.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions. Meet the Teacher Night is usually the third week in September; you will be getting more information about that when the time gets closer. Meanwhile, would you please complete the enclosed information sheet and send it back with your child tomorrow. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Wendy Brand

September 10, 1990

Dear Parents,

This first week is over and your children and I have been learning a lot about each other. What a wonderful class I have! I know it will be a good year.

Tentative reading groups will be forming in the next couple of weeks. In my class it is normal for children to change groups as their needs and learning spurts change. Do not be alarmed.

I am sending the book (Basal reader name, level variable) for (Child's name here) to borrow until he/she has read it smoothly with only occasional errors. Keep it as long as necessary. My suggestion is to practice reading no more than one story a night. If your child wants to read more, have him/her read previous stories or one of the poems I send home or another book. The reading we do in class will complement what you do at home. Look at this book as an anthology of stories for beginning readers.

By the way, homework is every night, including Fridays. Since the homework consists of free-choice reading, this should not be a chore since all of you indicated in the Parent Survey that you read to your child every night. Great! Keep it up! Substitute this book for a bit of your own, but don't neglect your books for reading aloud until your child prefers to read alone or aloud to you. Most

children enjoy being read to throughout the elementary grades, no matter how well they read. My daughter is an excellent reader in fourth grade and she likes me to read aloud from one book and then she reads other books herself afterwards.

This is one suggested method to get the most out of these basal "practice" reading books:

1. Read the stories in order since the vocabulary is dependent on the previous stories and your child will get a lot of success that way.
2. Read the story aloud to your child in its entirety. Point to each word as you say it and read with expression.
3. Have your child read to you, pointing to each word. Do not ask him/her to sound the words out except to ask what the first sound is. If this does not help, have your child look at the picture for clues. Then ask, "What would make sense here?" If there is more than one word giving trouble, go back and read the entire page aloud, again pointing to the words or else, simply tell your child the word. Reading needs to be fun for the child to read. Only if it is fun and easy will your child read for pleasure. Reading is a skill that improves only through practice. So our job, both yours and mine, is giving the children as many opportunities to read both inside and outside of school. If you have any questions, please call me. The school number is 287-8496.

Mrs. Brand

This letter was sent in the middle of October. After this, all notes concerning reading were sent home for individual or small groups of children.

Your children are working so hard! You would really be amazed to see how well they are writing and reading. But I hope you are not too surprised at the reading because I hope you are listening to them read every night. As a break, read to them instead! One thing about me, I AM A NAG! READ! I guarantee that the more time your child spends reading, the better reader he/she will be. It almost sounds too simple, but it is true. Even though in our class the children have many more minutes of reading time than in the traditional elementary classes you and I attended growing up, time spent reading at home will really pay off in terms of your child's reading proficiency.

Mrs. Brand

APPENDIX C

TITLES CHOSEN AS FAVORITES BY THE CHILDREN

First Week of Evaluation

The Wolf's Chicken's Stew

Horses

Chanticleer and the Fox

Morris Goes to School

The Pain and the Great One

I Can Draw

Sideways Stories from Wayside School

Wayside School Is Falling Down

Where Did My Mother Go?

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Baseball Joe

Karen's Little Sister

Charlotte's Web

Little Ballerina

The Puppy Who Wanted a Boy

Where Did My Teacher Go?

Eloise

Second Week of Evaluation

The Christmas Cookie Sprinkle

The Wolf's Chicken Stew

The Nutcracker

Chanticleer and the Fox

Hamsters

Wayside School Is Falling Down

Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins

The Magic School Bus in the Solar System

Sideways Stories from Wayside School

The Jolly Postman

True Story of Baseball

Eloise

Charlotte's Web

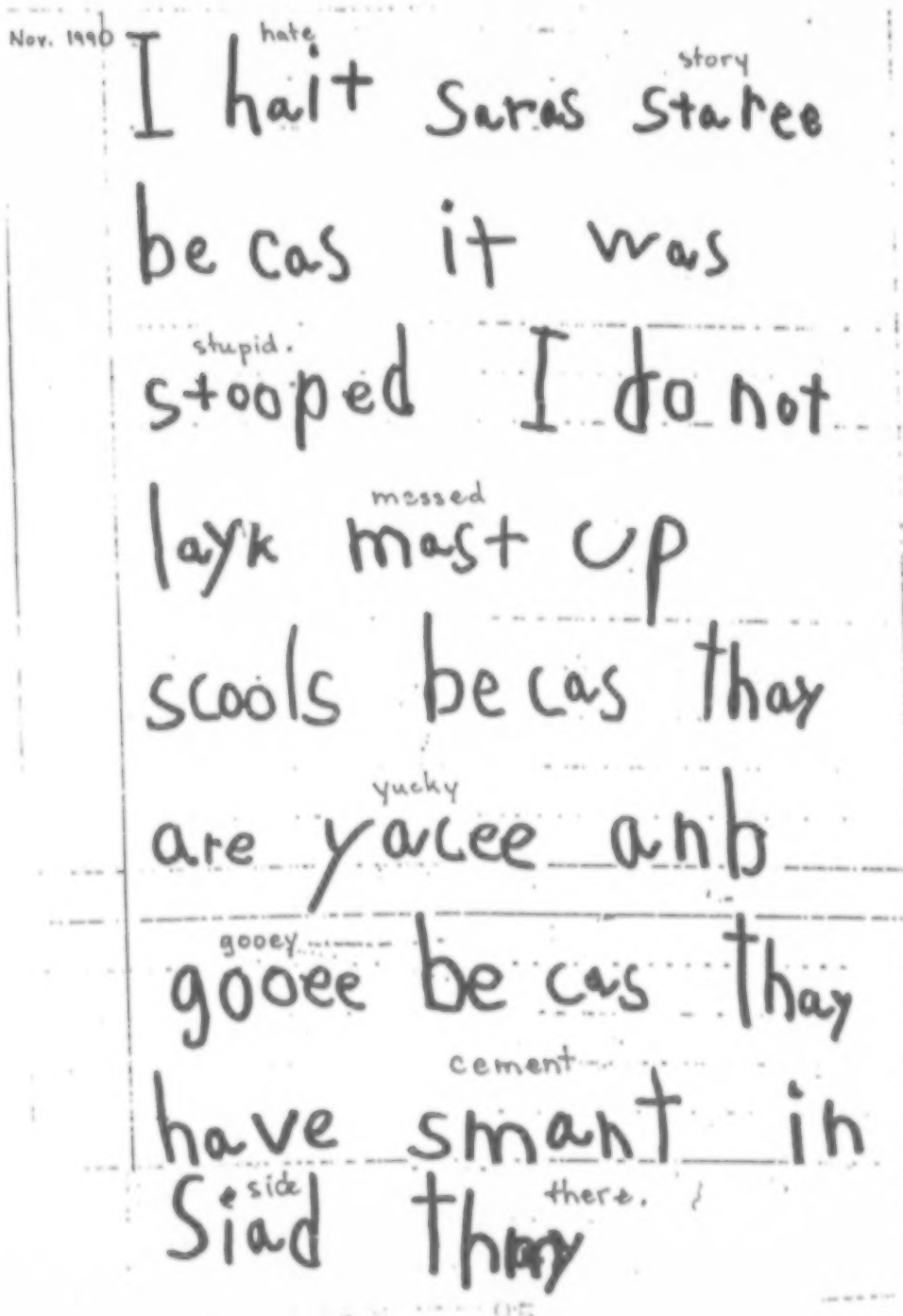
The Life and Legends of Santa Claus

The Slimy Book

APPENDIX D

SAMPLES OF CHILDREN'S WRITING

Unless the child gives me a journal to read, I do not write in them. The small words written above Matt's writing is for the purpose of this practicum only.



Dec 1990

90

Me and Tom.

Me and Tom play

football evey day

with Adam's

football. We Like

to play football

because it is fun

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11-14

Today it was fun. becuase mrs. brand gave thies note books out tous-and I like that!

Great! I'm glad you like them!

APPENDIX E

SAMPLES OF CHILDREN'S WRITING READY FOR PUBLICATION

The following poems are a sample of those which were published for poetry books that were made as Christmas/Hanukkah gifts for parents.

Beasts are mean,
Toys are red,
Santa is an old man
Sliding on his sled.
--Matt Lavin

Barbies are beautiful,
Teddy bears are loveable,
Roses are lavender,
All mothers are huggable.
--Melanie Heckman

The Enterprise is fast,
Robots are moving,
Beasts are hungry,
Cool people are grooving.
--Matt Taranto

Fossils are hard,
Robocop is shooting,
Cats are nice,
Fugitives are looting.
--Joey Greer

The following stories were published either in the school newsletter, our class magazine, or in individual books. The decision to publish was made by the child and the teacher; the choice of where to publish was made solely by the teacher on the basis of length and content.

Valentine's Day with Morris and Boris

by Eric Pilgren

"Today is Valentine's Day, Morris said.

"You mean Moose-tine's Day."

"No," said Boris.

"And people give their teachers Valentine's Day cards."

"You mean Moose-day cards."

The End

Lions and Tigers

by Erica Quigley

"Somebody help me," the girl tiger screamed. The boy tiger was way ahead of her. The girl said, "Here children, here." The children heard. They all went faster. "Yes," said the mom. "You are fast enough. Stop and turn around."

"Oh no, We are trapped! There is just one way out. But Daddy, we don't know how to climb."

"Oh dear," said the family. "We have no way out" So they climbed over the monsters. They all were with the family. They ran home to the hiding place.

The End

The Dragon Who Would Not Let the Princess Go

by Caitlin Clark

Once there was a castle and there was a princess who lived in it. So she was happy. But there was a dragon guarding it. And the princess' name was Allison. Allison was sad because the dragon would not let her go. There was a telephone. So she called the magic man and the magic man gave her a sleeping potion. The magic man said that it might work on anything else but dragons. So one night the princess dropped the potion on the dragon and down, down, down went the potion and it landed on the dragon. He was asleep forever.

The End

Books

by Tara Schillinger

I like books. My family likes books. Do you like books? I read to my puppy. My puppy likes it. I like to read. My mom likes to read. My dad likes to read. I like to read. I like to read to my puppy.

The End

The Ghost of John

by Nicole Paraggio

Once there was the ghost of John. He was mean. He smashed flowers and a spider and a bird.The next day a little girl came to the haunted house. She was scared. Then the ghost of John stamped on the little girl and she was dead. Forever.

Butterflies

by Amanda Winberg

Butterflies are beautiful. Do you know how they get started? First they are a tiny egg. Then they are a caterpillar. They grow a chrysalid and hang around for a while. Finally they come out and this is exhausting. They get to be a butterfly. Now they are happy because they are so pretty.

The End

The Prince and the Princess

by Kristine Belford

Once upon a time there was a daughter of a king. She was a princess. She was the most beautiful lady in the wide world. There was also a handsome prince. He was the handsomest man in the wide world. One day the princess saw the prince. She said hi. The prince said hi. And they fell in love and got married. And they lived happily ever after.

The End

The Dog That Hated Wheels

by Louis Lepore

Once I had a dog that hated wheels. He bit them. He chewed them. He buried them. He hated them. I tried what I could. He could have a bath but he hates baths. What will I try? I am tired and I have no bed. What will I do? I do not like dogs. I am a fool if I do not know why I don't like dogs.

The End